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CURRENT SUPPORT MEMORANDUM

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Comments on Khrushchev ICBM Statement

The statement in Khrushchev's "Theses" on the Soviet Seven-Year Plan that "production of intercontinental ballistic missiles has been set up successfully", if interpreted in the normal context of the Russian words used, would imply that initial tooling of ICBM production facilities has been recently completed, that the technology of production is considered mastered and probably has been demonstrated, and that initial delivery of production ICBMs is about to begin. ^{while} The phrasing of the statement ~~indicates~~ indicates that a new phase of the production program has been reached, ^{it} ~~which~~ provides no inference as to expected future rates of production for ICBMs. Khrushchev's statement, ^{for example,} ~~would be~~ equally consistent with completion of preparations to produce at a future maximum rate of, say, 5 ICBMs a month, or at a much higher rate. Although the possibility cannot be excluded that the statement refers to the setting up of production of the test ICBMs and earth satellite vehicles launched to date from Tyuratam, the language used does not convey that meaning. If in fact it refers to the "setting up" of the production which has already taken place, it is deliberately misleading both to the Soviets who read ^{it} ~~and~~ and to the West.

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The statement as it appears in Pravda is as follows:

Uspeshno nalazheno proizvodstvo (of)
(successfully) (has been set up) (the production)

mezhkontinental'nykh ballisticheskikh "raket."
(intercontinental) (ballistic) (rockets)

The word "nalazheno" is the past passive participle of the verb "naladit'" which means to set up, to adjust, to tune up. Naladit' is also the perfective aspect of the verb which signifies that the actions involved have been completed. Naladit' proizvodstvo means "to set up production" and would normally apply to pre-production activities such as tooling, adaptation or conversion of facilities, and prototype production including the final tuning up, adjusting and preparations for larger scale production which would shortly follow. Its modification by the word "uspeshno" ("successfully") would normally imply that "success" in the "setting up of production" had been demonstrated by actual production in the facilities involved, and that the trial and error period in introducing the new product into production was over; major production bugs would have been ironed out.

Interpretation of Khrushchev's statement depends to some extent on various words which could have been selected, but were not, to convey other meanings. For example, Khrushchev did not say that production "is being set up successfully" (uspeshno nalazhivaetsya), which would have indicated that this activity is still in process, nor did he state that ICBMs "are being produced successfully" (uspeshno proizvodyatsya).

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which would have signified that production ICBMs were already being delivered to the military user. It must be assumed that, in as important a report as the "Thesen", which will have very wide circulation within the USSR as well as abroad, the wording of any statement on ICBMs would have been chosen with care. Consequently, the phraseology which Khrushchev actually employed appears to indicate that he intended to state quite explicitly that all preparations for production have been completed but that deliveries have not yet commenced.

It is not possible to judge the veracity or purpose of Khrushchev's statement. If it is an accurate representation of the status of this program, it would indicate a Soviet capability to begin deliveries of production ICBMs at the earliest date -- the beginning of 1959 -- which has been considered possible in current estimates. It would also indicate that the basic design of the Soviet ICBM system had been accepted early and that the decision to prepare for production probably was made before the first ICBM test firing from Tyuratam in August 1957.

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